

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O R 050648Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3229
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 0940

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IS, LE, SY, UNSC, US
SUBJECT: SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON

REF: STATE 046806

1. SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSED SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS. LATTER HAS DOUBTS ABOUT EFFICACY OF UN FORCES IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT WANTS TO CLEAR DECK FOR INVOCATION OF ONE IF GOL DECIDES IT WANTS IT. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE TRUCE IN SOUTH LIKELY UNTIL LEBANESE FORCE AND ISRAELIS HAVE COMPLETED THEIR BUFFER ZONE. HE FEELS STABILITY OF LEBANON THREATENED AND WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT WE CAN DO TO HELP, BUT DOES NOT SEEM PREPARED TO COME TO GRIPS WITH DOMESTIC ASPECTS OF PROBLEM. AMBASSADOR SUGGESTS WE SHOULD MAINTAIN POSITIVE STANCE, INCLUDING SUPPORT FOR UN FORCE. END SUMMARY.

2. FOREIGN MINISTER BEING IN CAIRO, I DELIVERED MESSAGE IN REFTTEL REGARDING U.S. ATTITUDES ON UN CONFIDENTIAL

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FORCE FOR LEBANON TO PRESIDENT SARKIS MARCH 3. SARKIS, WHO EVIDENTLY LOOKING FOR SUPPORT AND COUNSEL, ENGAGED ME IN CONVERSATION FOR FORTY-FIVE MINUTES, DURING WHICH FOLLOWING POINTS EMERGED:

3. SARKIS, AFTER WRITING DOWN OUR RESPONSE (WHICH I GAVE TO HIM IN FRENCH, SAYING WE HAD NO "IDEES

PRECONCUES" ON SUBJECT) ASKED WHAT FURTHER RESPONSE HE COULD EXPECT FROM US. I SAID I HOPED WE COULD LET HIM KNOW NEXT WEEK WHETHER OR NOT WE WOULD BE ABLE TO SUPPORT LEBANESE REQUEST FOR UN FORCE IF ONE WERE MADE TO UNSC. HE ASKED THAT IF RESPONSE CAME WHILE HE IN CAIRO (MARCH 6-9) WE TRANSMIT IT TO HIM (OR FONMIN BOUTROS) VIA OUR EMBASSY THERE.

4. SARKIS THEN SAID THAT SPEAKING UNOFFICIALLY, AND TAKING LITERALLY PRESIDENT CARTER'S LETTER SAYING I ENJOYED HIS CONFIDENCE, HE WANTED TO KNOW ATTITUDE OF GREAT POWERS TOWARD, AND LIKELIHOOD OF UN APPROVAL OF, REQUEST FOR UN FORCE BECAUSE IT MIGHT BE USEFUL INTERVENTION, ALTHOUGH HE HAD SOME RESERVATIONS ABOUT UTILITY OF ONE AT PRESENT BECAUSE HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO CONSTITUTE A FORCE WHICH WOULD ACTUALLY RESTORE ORDER AS OPPOSED TO MERELY OBSERVING IMPLEMENTATION OF A TRUCE. THERE WAS NO TRUCE IN SOUTH LEBANON AND HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER NEUTRAL POWERS SUCH AS NORWEGIANS AND DANES WOULD AGREE TO HAVE THEIR YOUNG MEN TAKE ON COMBAT ROLES. THERE WAS ALSO QUESTION OF ACCEPTABILITY OF UN FORCE TO REST OF ARABS AND TO LEBANESE THEMSELVES. HE THOUGHT ARAB ATMOSPHERE TODAY SUCH THAT PREVIOUS OBJECTIONS TO INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE MIGHT BE OVERCOME. THE SAME WAS PROBABLY TRUE OF LEBANESE.
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PRINCIPAL QUESTION FOR HIM REMAINED EFFICACY OF SUCH A FORCE IN PRESENT SITUATION.

5. I SAID FORCE, IF CONSTITUTED, WOULD HAVE TO BE DIFFERENT FROM PREDECESSORS. IT WOULD HAVE TO BE PREPARED FOR POSSIBLE COMBAT ROLE. I TOO DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THAT WAS POSSIBLE. I THEN ASKED WHETHER IT NOT POSSIBLE TO ARRANGE TRUCE BETWEEN WARRING FACTIONS, I.E. BETWEEN LEBANESE FORCES AND PALESTINIANS. HE TOOK ME OVER TO LARGE SCALE MAP AND SHOWED ME WHAT HE CONSIDERED TO BE ULTIMATE STRATEGY OF LEBANESE FORCES AND ISRAELIS-- A BUFFER ZONE FROM NAQURA TO KAWKABA. HE SAID HE DID NOT THINK TRUCE WAS POSSIBLE UNTIL LEBANESE

FORCES, AND THOSE BEHIND THEM (I.E. ISRAELIS) HAD ACHIEVED THEIR GOAL WHICH WAS: (1) BUFFER ZONE AND (2) ISOLATION OF FEDAYEEN IN ARQUB FROM REST OF LEBANON. HE DID NOT THINK CHAMOUNISTS REALLY

PLANNED TO PURGE AREA UP TO LITANI OF PALESTINIANS.
THAT WOULD SURPRISE HIM GREATLY. HE THOUGHT THEY
WOULD BE CONTENT WITH BUFFER ZONE, BUT WOULD
NOT SIGN TRUCE UNTIL THAT OBTAINED.

6. HE NOTED THAT SITUATION VERY UNSETTLING AND
THAT STABILITY OF LEBANON WAS THREATENED. HE
MENTIONED FIGURE OF 300,000 SHIA WHO HAD FLED TO
BEIRUT (WE ARE TOLD 200 OF THEM TRIED TO TAKE OVER
BRISTOL HOTEL MARCH 3) AND SAID IT WAS NOT AS
THOUGH HE DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH PROBLEMS ALREADY.
HE HAD TALKED TO ARAFAT ON
WEEKEND AND TOLD HIM THAT PLO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR
PROBLEM, AND PARTICULARLY FOR ISOLATION OF CHRISTIAN
VILLAGES. ARAFAT HAD PROMISED TO DO EVERYTHING HE
COULD TO CALM SITUATION AND TO REOPEN ROADS IF
THERE WERE ARMISTICE. SARKIS NOTED THAT PLO INTERESTED
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IN ARMISTICE BECAUSE IT FELT ITSELF THREATENED.

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ACTION SS-25

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7. SARKIS THEN ASKED, "I PUT IT TO YOU DIRECTLY,
WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR US IN THE SOUTH?" I REPLIED

THAT THERE WERE VARIOUS THEORETICAL POSSIBILITIES--
(A) WE COULD PRESSURE THE ISRAELIS TO LET THE ASF ENTER
TYRE AND NABATIYAH, BUT THE ISRAELIS WOULD PROBABLY
REFUSE. (B) WE WOULD SUPPORT A LEBANESE REQUEST
FOR A UN FORCE, BUT HE HIMSELF HAD POINTED OUT THE
PROBLEMS THERE. (C) WE COULD ASSIST A LEBANESE ARMY
BUT NOT THE POLICE FORCE. (D) WE COULD TALK TO THE
ISRAELIS AND CARRY MESSAGES BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES.
(E) IF HE WANTED, I WAS EVEN WILLING TO TALK TO THOSE
LEBANESE LEADERS WHO WERE SUPPORTING THE LEBANESE
FORCES IN THEIR ATTACKS ON THE PALESTINIANS.

8. SARKIS SAID HE WOULD NOT MIND MY TALKING TO
PIERRE GEMAYEL AND CHAMOUN, BUT HE HAD TALKED
TO CHAMOUN'S SON DANY AND THE LATTER HAD SAID
SITUATION IN SOUTH BEYOND CONTROL OF CHAMOUNISTS
AND PHALANGE. I SAID IT DOUBTFUL CHRISTIAN FORCES
COULD CONTINUE OPERATIONS AS THEY WERE DOING
WITHOUT REINFORCEMENTS WHICH THEY GETTING FROM
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NORTH AND WHICH COMING IN VIA ACRE (SARKIS HIMSELF
HAD SAID MARONITES FROM SOUTH SO FEW IN NUMBER
(ABOUT 20,000) THAT THEY DID NOT EVEN RATE A DEPUTY
IN PARLIAMENT.)

9. SARKIS REVERTED TO DISCUSSION OF DANGERS OF
PRESENT SITUATION, SAYING THAT HE COULD NOT
UNDERSTAND ISRAELI OBJECTION TO PRESENCE OF A FEW
HUNDRED TROOPS SENT IN TO ACT AS POLICE FORCE.
THEY WERE TRYING TO PREVENT HIM FROM EXERCISING
SOVEREIGNTY OVER PART OF HIS COUNTRY. IT WAS ISRAELI
WHO WERE ESTABLISHING DANGEROUS PRECEDENT, NOT
HE, AND HE CERTAINLY DID NOT WANT TO DISCUSS RED
LINE WITH THEM IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. HE
THOUGHT BEST THING WE COULD DO WAS TO TELL ISRAELIS
TO STOP PUSHING MARONITES.

10. I LEFT, PROMISING TO LET SARKIS KNOW USG POSITION
ON UN FORCES AS SOON AS RECEIVED. HE SAID HE WAS SURE
WE WOULD HAVE MANY MORE CONVERSATIONS ON SUBJECT
AFTER HIS RETURN FROM CAIRO.

11. COMMENT: THERE WAS SURREALISTIC QUALITY ABOUT
ENTIRE CONVERSATION. SARKIS AT ONE POINT ASKED ME
TO DESCRIBE CURRENT SITUATION IN SOUTH BECAUSE HE
NOT INFORMED. HE SEEMED UNWILLING TO COME TO GGROPS
WITH CEASE-FIRE IDEA (WHICH IS BEING ACTIVELY PURSUED
BY SHIA DEPUTIES ABDUL LATIF ZEIN AND ALI KHALIL) AND
IF HE REALLY BELIEVES CHAMOUNISTS AND PHALANGISTS

AND LEBANESE ARMY HEADQUARTERS HAVE NO CONTROL OVER EVENTS IN SOUTH, HE IS IN FACT UNINFORMED. I SUSPECT THAT, INFORMED OR NOT, SARKIS WOULD WELCOME COMPLETION OF BUFFER ZONE, BUT IS CONCERNED AT THE LENGTH OF TIME IT IS TAKING AND FEARS THAT SITUATION WILL BECOME INTOLERABLE BEFORE ZONE COMPLETE. HE SEEMED NOT TO REALIZE POTENTIAL THREAT POSED BY ORGANIZED
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PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE (HE NOT AWARE PALESTINIANS WELL-ARMED) AND TO BE FOCUSED RATHER ON STRICTLY LEBANESE ASPECTS OF PROBLEM.

12. AT ONE POINT I SUGGESTED TO SARKIS THAT GOL TRY TO PUT TOGETHER A FORCE OF MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS WHO HAD NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN CIVIL WAR AND CONSTITUTE THEM AS NUCLEUS OF NEW LEBANESE ARMY, WHICH WE COULD HELP MODESTLY. HE IGNORED THIS, AND ASKED ME QUESTION REPORTED ABOVE ABOUT WHAT WE CAN DO FOR THEM IN THE SOUTH.

13. CONCLUSIONS. SARKIS'S APPARENT UNWILLINGNESS TO FOCUS ON POSSIBLE INTERNAL REMEDIES FOR PROBLEM INDICATES TO ME THAT HE IS GOING TO DO NOTHING FOR THE PRESENT. I DOUBT THAT HE WILL EVEN REQUEST UN FORCE BEFORE BUFFER ZONE CREATED, UNLESS HE JUDGES SITUATION HAS BECOME TOO EXPLOSIVE, BY WHICH TIME IT MAY BE TOO LATE. I THINK WE SHOULD MAINTAIN OUR POSITIVE STANCE, GIVE SARKIS SUCH MORAL SUPPORT AS WE CAN, AND BE PREPARED TO SUPPORT UN FORCE PROPOSAL IF AND WHEN IT IS MADE.
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